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Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

6016th meeting

Friday, 14 November 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Urbina / Mr. Ballestero	(Costa Rica)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Grauls
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. La Yifan
	Croatia	Mr. Jurica
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Terzi di Sant'Agata
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Laher
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Sawers
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1830 (2008) (S/2008/688)

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08-60200 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1830 (2008) (S/2008/688)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Iraq, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the course of the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation, under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure, to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/688, which contains the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1830 (2008).

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, Permanent Representative of the United States of America, on behalf of the Multinational Force.

I now give the floor to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

Mr. De Mistura: I am pleased to appear before the Council today, just over a year since I assumed my duties in Baghdad, to present the fifth quarterly report on behalf of the Secretary-General (S/2008/688).

With a robust mandate reconfirmed by resolution 1830 (2008) and at the request of the Government of Iraq, the focus of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in 2008 has been in the areas that could support Iraq's efforts towards political dialogue and national reconciliation. That was largely achieved in recent months by supporting electoral preparations, sowing the seeds for a resolution to disputed internal boundaries, supporting the national development strategies and facilitating Iraq's partnership with the international community and, indeed, its neighbours.

The past year was dedicated to identifying opportunities in the priority areas where we would most likely be able together to achieve timely results. Next year will be the time to consolidate the progress that has been made so far. We have to move forward from the initiatives that, as a matter of urgency, have served as an entry point for those in going forward to solidifying longer-term gains.

Let us for a moment look at the context in Iraq these days. The summer and fall have witnessed, despite some occasional spikes — and we have again seen some in the past few days — a steady reduction in the levels of violence in Iraq. That is unquestionable, in spite of the spikes, and we may see more in the forthcoming months, but we should look at the broader picture, which is that security has improved. A handful of rockets have impacted on the International Zone since last May, whereas in May there were 30 blasts a day. The truce declared by Moqtada al-Sadr has been observed and extended. The reported Iraqi casualties for October 2008 throughout Iraq were the lowest since March 2003 — and, of course, they are never too low. Any level of civilian casualty will always remain condemnable, regrettable and sad, but the fact remains that it is now at its lowest.

The Government of Iraq has taken over responsibility for many issues in Iraq, including the Awakening Councils and payment of tens of thousands of their members. Some sectors of the Iraqi security

forces have greatly improved — we have seen it with our own eyes when we have been travelling in Iraq — in their professionalism and performance. However, the reporting period saw also some political tensions as a result of the initial stalemate over the provincial elections law in July and the issues of minority representation in the elections.

Iraq is now entering a very delicate electoral period, in which every small security gain likely to give space to political dialogue should be built upon, in order to avoid any violence linked to the provincial elections of 31 January 2009. The confrontation in Khanaqin during the summer months and the spike in anti-Christian violence in Mosul are only two examples of a situation that could have undermined the hard-earned progress made by the Iraqi leadership to bridge their differences and further an Iraqi-owned and Iraqi-led democratic process.

Electoral assistance has been our flagship in recent months, and, of all our activities, is likely to be so in the forthcoming ones. It is our firm duty as the United Nations and an integral part of our mandate to assist the Iraqis and the Independent High Electoral Commission, the Iraqi institution responsible for preparing and conducting the elections, with a series of electoral events, starting with provincial elections in the immediate future — January 2009 — and culminating in the parliamentary elections between the end of 2009 and early 2010. The elections law, providing for countrywide elections in 14 out of 18 governorates, is the most important piece of legislation enacted in that period. The law was adopted on 24 September and required a major push by UNAMI to break the impasse in Parliament over the inclusion of an amendment on Kirkuk. Finally, it was possible to broker an even-handed resolution.

The Government of Iraq and the Parliament of Iraq should be commended for that, because it is a major achievement. Even following its ratification, the election law suffered a second difficult moment when the article accounting for minority representation of Christians, Yezidis, Shebek and Sabean Mandeans in some provincial councils was dropped at the last minute. That unfortunately produced intimidation and tension — particularly in the context of the volatile area of Mosul — and risked unravelling both the electoral law and the electoral timelines, and ultimately jeopardizing the principle of minority rights, which in Iraq is an important principle recognized by everyone.

With the aim of reducing growing tension and the temptation to resort to intimidation or to force displacement of minority populations, UNAMI put forward a proposal on the allocation of seats for minorities in provincial councils. The proposal also provided for political recognition of some groups which have undergone severe campaigns of targeted violence and assimilation in the past. It is important to remember what happened to the Yezidis in 2007 or to the Christians very recently.

Following several rounds of consultations over the span of two weeks, the Council of Representatives decided on 3 November to allocate specific seats for representatives of Iraq's minority components on the provincial councils in Baghdad, Ninawa and Basra. The decision to secure minority representation in Iraq is a positive achievement in its own right. Although it must be admitted that the adopted amendment to the electoral law did not entirely reflect UNAMI's formulation of numbers, it did include some of its crucial elements. Its adoption by a majority open vote was a demonstration of democracy in action — in Iraq that is a very positive development — and contributed to furthering respect for human rights and democracy. Both principles are strengthened through the commitment of Iraqi institutions to recognize and guarantee minority representation in their elected governing bodies. That is only a "seed representation" which can open the door for improved guarantees of minority rights in the future; but the door has been opened.

The Presidency Council's green light — a decision taken recently — completed the elections law without either compromising or endangering their overall timetable. In other words, the electoral law is confirmed, including its minority component.

Public interest in the voter registration update in September and general satisfaction with the passage of the elections law appear to confirm a grassroots desire to have a say on who should be represented on the provincial councils. The Iraqi people want the elections. The forthcoming elections are rightly viewed as an opportunity to establish a more inclusive sectarian balance and shape a new political landscape. They represent the most significant political event in the forthcoming months. It is therefore all the more important to ensure that they be perceived as free and fair, and that the Iraqis, with the support of the United Nations and the international community, will be able

to ensure respect for operational timelines and that the Electoral Commission will be free of political pressure.

The good news is that the electoral timelines are now broadly on track, with candidate nomination concluded on 2 November and the swift inclusion of minority candidates in the Electoral Commission ballot lottery having taken place on 6 November. UNAMI continues to support the Electoral Commission in technical preparations, including the printing and procurement of materials, planning and logistics, public outreach, consultations with security forces to ensure that governorate elections are conducted in safety, putting anti-fraud measures in place, and training national staff. We are working to remove any outstanding operational hurdles, and that will be done. Our job is to assist in those efforts together with the Iraqi authorities.

All sides should be encouraged to avoid the temptation to manipulate the electoral process or to create any incentives for intimidation before or during the polling day. The Electoral Commission, supported by UNAMI, has trained 42,785 local observers and is working with the Minister of Education to employ approximately 270,000 teachers, clerks and headmasters to assist on polling day. The Prime Minister has wisely decided to postpone school examinations in order to allow the schools and the teachers to be available on that important day.

Mitigating measures to reduce the potential for electoral fraud should ideally be matched by some form of close monitoring, particularly in sensitive areas of the north, and we are currently exploring some feasible options. Security, of course, will also be an element we cannot ignore. However, the main burden for ensuring transparency of the elections rests with the Iraqi national observers and party agents. They have been invited to be present at polling stations on the day of the elections.

Concerning Kirkuk and the so-called disputed internal boundaries or territories, the recent targeted killings and the displacement of Christians in the area of the northern faultlines illustrate the complicated connections between minority rights, the electoral process and disputed boundaries. UNAMI is pursuing its work on those issues in accordance with the mandate given to it by the Security Council.

In Kirkuk, which has been under relative calm in recent weeks, our activities have been wide-ranging. They comprise research on conditions in the area and include various possible options for its future administrative status, humanitarian, reconstruction and human rights programmes and, at the request of the Speaker of Parliament, Mr. Mashhadani, technical assistance to a Committee that has just been established by Parliament to make recommendations on special arrangements for future Kirkuk elections. Those elections will not take place in January with the other elections, but later on after the Committee has finished its job, which is expected to be at the end of March. At that time UNAMI will assist with the Kirkuk elections at the request of the Iraqi Parliament.

In parallel, we have advanced our analysis on the last phase of all of the other 15 faultline districts in northern Iraq — from the Syrian to the Iranian border — concluding our community consultations in the Ninawa, Diyala and Salahaddin governorates.

We believe that UNAMI's analysis will provide options for intercommunal confidence-building measures. We are probably now considered, through that research and in that context, to be the most detailed experts on those areas because there has been a lot of work. Seventeen of my colleagues have been working on a full-time basis for the last eight months on that project. Confidence-building measures should be in place in order to facilitate an overall political agreement between the various affected communities. This is not a referendum or a fait accompli, but a political agreement.

UNAMI supports renewed efforts by the Constitutional Review Committee to enshrine an agreement dealing with competing visions of Iraq's federal framework, as well as with hydrocarbons and viable revenue and water-sharing agreements. While we remain poised to present our work to the Iraqi leadership, we are mindful not to complicate matters by presenting the results of our work prematurely, since the elections are drawing closer and are a priority. Later we can come up with our proposals. Let us first complete the elections.

As to human rights, the UNAMI Human Rights Office continues to balance its ongoing monitoring and protection activities with emerging human rights challenges arising from elections, the resolution of the disputed territories, including the recent displacement of Christians, the forcible sale of property in Ninawa, or minority representation. We will continue to devote

significant attention to the legislative process related to human rights and the rule of law, and to establishing important institutions related to human rights, such as a national human rights commission in Iraq. We will also maintain our strong support, in the form of capacity-building, for the work of the Ministry of Human Rights of Iraq, led by a very courageous woman.

In the area of international partnership, Iraq has made important strides in its re-engagement with the international community, primarily through the International Compact with Iraq — which is strongly supported by my friend and colleague Ambassador Gambari — and the ad hoc support mechanism within the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both are facilitating venues for cooperation on concrete issues, such as refugees, the resumption of diplomatic relations and anti-corruption measures, in a spirit of partnership and equal standing.

The very successful Stockholm meeting — and we should thank the Government of Sweden for having facilitated it — ended with a message on the need for partnership and co-financing. Greater Iraqi ownership, the fact that the Compact has drawn the attention of the Prime Minister — who attended the meeting and, I understand, was impressed by its results — and the Prime Minister's appointment of his own Adviser as part of the Advisory Committee have created additional impetus to the follow-up to the Compact. Iraq has also become a signatory to the Paris Declaration, signalling its desire for more transparent management of its aid strategy. Meanwhile, donors are increasingly focusing on reducing aid budgets — Iraq is a rich country, a fact of which it is aware and proud — in favour of capacity-building aimed at Iraqi self-reliance.

The regional dialogue front is a promising area for 2009 and has seen signs of very promising movement in 2008. We have seen considerable progress in view of the fact that several Arab countries have reopened their embassies in Baghdad and that a number of high-level visits have taken place in recent months. UNAMI continues to be engaged through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' ad hoc support mechanism unit, which is building its institutional capacity to support those processes. Planning is under way for ministerial meetings in the coming weeks. Meetings of the working group on energy and of the ministers of the interior have taken place in Istanbul and Amman, and preparations are under way for meetings of the working groups on refugees and border security, to be held in November in Amman and Damascus, respectively.

Good-faith initiatives to support Iraq's bilateral relations, on issues such as technical border demarcation, security, de-mining and missing persons, go a long way, in terms of political mileage, towards restoring a spirit of cooperation. UNAMI has been and will continue to be proactively involved in assisting and facilitating such goodwill measures.

Iraq is reaching a critical point in its recovery and reconstruction. Unavoidably, with improved security comes a growing demand from the people to meet the basic needs of ordinary Iraqis, including jobs and services. It is on that basis that the Iraqi people will judge their own authorities and that the electorate will hold local representatives accountable.

Across Iraq, signs of normal daily life are increasingly visible; I myself see them every time I cross into what we call the "red zone" in Baghdad. In Baghdad, once the site of some of Iraq's worst violence, we see shops and businesses reopening and even remaining open at night. More than 60,000 Iraqis have returned home this year. Food insecurity has declined from 15 per cent in 2005 to 3 per cent in 2007 and 2008. In other words, there is much less food insecurity now than there was just one year ago.

However, let us also be frank: life is not improving equally for all Iraqis. Many still feel the impact of the past conflict and of chronic neglect dating back to the 1990s. Major infrastructure and service delivery problems are still challenging. Employment opportunities have not grown along with oil revenues, keeping some Iraqis in poverty. In pockets of Iraq today, less than a third of the population receives basic water services and not enough children attend school. But we know that the Government is seriously focusing on those areas and planning to use its increased resources for them.

A rising number of internally displaced persons — increasing from 16,000 in June to 35,000 in August — are beginning to return home, signalling increased confidence in Iraq's stability. However, Government action is still required in order to make sure that conditions are in place to guarantee safe returns, in which case we will probably see more of them. In order to fill critical humanitarian gaps in-country and to support Iraqi refugees abroad until the necessary conditions exist for returns in safety and

dignity, a subregional humanitarian appeal for Iraq in 2009 will be launched next week.

Better security and high oil revenues mean that the Iraqi Government is increasingly able and willing to address national development issues. I would therefore urge the Government to continue its effort to allocate national resources in 2009, even in the current uncertain financial climate worldwide — which also applies to Iraq — in order to maintain the momentum for recovery. Iraq has entered into a new cooperation framework for United Nations assistance through 2010, shifting the focus from investing in infrastructure to helping to mobilize its own substantial resources.

Whereas the Government of Iraq is hindered by a large public sector, which has grown from 1 million to 2.5 million people since 2005, the private sector, which could become a thriving backbone for the Iraqi economy, is still dormant and requires assistance, and there continues to be an insufficient budget execution capacity. In other words, there is a lot of money, but it is not percolating into operational projects. The remainder of the funds of the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq will therefore be specifically invested in three United Nations initiatives, aimed at public sector reform, private sector development and the decentralization of essential services. The United Nations is also supporting Iraq in reforming its costly public distribution system — food coupons — which consumed $5.9 billion in national resources in 2008 and can be reformed.

In terms of its footprint, UNAMI has explored ways to increase its level of support for provincial authorities by applying the principles of integrated United Nations missions and an enhanced presence throughout the country, starting with new presences in Najaf, Ramadi, Mosul, Kirkuk and Basra. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, the United Nations Office for Project Services and the International Organization for Migration are the latest agencies to have a permanent senior-level international presence within the country, bring the number of agencies there to more than nine. That is complemented by national staff whom we have appointed as Governorate Liaison Officers and co-located in governors' offices in 10 locations.

In order to pursue and sustain the level of its presence and the extent of its activities, UNAMI obviously requires both security support and protection from the host country and sustained financial and logistical backing from Member States, because security is costly.

The construction of a new integrated compound in Baghdad is key to the continued presence of the United Nations in Iraq. I would therefore like to thank the Government of Iraq for providing a site for the new integrated United Nations compound in Baghdad and particularly welcome the decision taken by the Prime Minister and the Iraqi Council of Ministers on 2 November to make what I understand to be an initial contribution of $25 million for 2009 towards an estimated total cost of $89 million for the compound.

Finally, where does all this leave Iraq and its friends? Iraq faces some critical months ahead. In spite of a reduction in the levels of violence, the potential for a flare-up remains a possibility, particularly with regard to the January elections in a year of elections. Iraqis should not relent in seizing the momentum in order to build on the gains attained in 2008.

The Government of Iraq should be commended for the progress achieved so far. It will now be called on to deliver services, security guarantees, conditions for free and fair elections, credible and independent institutions, and to resolve tensions among its various communities. The international community — all of us — should stand firm in its support and constructive re-engagement in this critical period. The United Nations will continue — as the Secretary-General has confirmed — if the Council allows it, to be by the Iraqis' side in this delicate and challenging transition towards stability.

This year is the fifth year since what happened at the Canal Hotel. Many of my friends — our friends — and colleagues died. I think that, for us, it is a matter of principle to prove that we are back and that Iraq is not alone.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the information that he has provided to the Council and for the excellent quality of that information.

Mr. Khalilzad (United States of America): I am pleased to report to the Security Council on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I). I would like

to begin by thanking Special Representative de Mistura for his briefing on the important work undertaken by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Mr. de Mistura's work and the work of his colleagues are critical to cementing the gains we have seen in Iraq, and I wish to extend our appreciation to him and his staff for their hard work and sacrifices. We remain committed to ensuring that UNAMI receives the support necessary to carry out its mission.

This year has been one of significant achievements in which the Iraqi Government, the Iraqi people and the international community can take pride. Yet a lot of work remains to be done. Progress in Iraq is fragile and reversible. It is critical that Iraq receive the continued support and encouragement of the international community as it faces the next set of challenges in rebuilding the country: legitimate and peaceful provincial, district and national elections in 2009; restoring essential services for its people; humanitarian efforts to support the return of approximately 4 million refugees and internally displaced persons; peaceful resolution on the status of disputed internal boundaries, most notably Kirkuk; and, of course, the constitutional review.

Today, I would like to update the Council on the progress that has been achieved.

As mentioned by Mr. de Mistura, the security situation has significantly improved since June 2007. The number of overall attacks has decreased by 86 per cent. Civilian deaths due to violence have decreased by 80 per cent. Iraqi Security Forces deaths have decreased by 84 per cent. United States military deaths in Iraq have decreased by 87 per cent. Coalition military deaths in Iraq have decreased by 88 per cent, and ethno-sectarian deaths have decreased by 95 per cent.

Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces have degraded the capabilities of Al-Qaida in Iraq and militia groups, as is evidenced by the 81 per cent decrease in improvised explosive device (IED) explosions and the 72 per cent decrease in suicide explosions.

A reduction in violence across northern Iraq can be attributed in part to the removal and displacement of key Al-Qaida leaders as a result of Iraqi-led security operations. But some political and factional tensions that have affected the delivery of services remain. The Government of Iraq, with coalition assistance, has begun addressing the complex underlying ethnic and religious tensions that contribute to violence by ensuring adherence to the rule of law and by establishing reconstruction operation centres to bring much needed essential services and economic investment.

Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces have maintained those security gains even with the reduction of coalition forces to pre-surge levels. Joint operations, in concert with the Awakening movement, have improved the security situation such that, even as a number of coalition countries depart the theatre, the United States has announced the early withdrawal of the Second Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division from Baghdad, bringing the number of brigade combat teams to below pre-surge levels.

Ongoing security operations have produced encouraging results, with arrests of significant Al-Qaida targets in Diyala, Mosul and Baghdad, as well as leaders of other armed groups in Baghdad, Basra, Maysan and Wasit provinces. The Iraqi people's increasing trust of the Iraqi Security Forces has also led to a number of record-breaking seizures of weapons caches, including several hundred IEDs in the Mada'in area and two tons of explosives in Ninawa. Primarily as a result of successful operations against Al-Qaida facilitation and support networks inside of Iraq, we are also beginning to see a decrease in the number of foreign fighters crossing into Iraq.

Nevertheless, we remain concerned by the flow of foreign fighters and lethal aid into the country. Syria remains the primary gateway for foreign terrorists moving into Iraq, and Damascus has taken insufficient action to combat the terrorist facilitation networks based in Syria. We urge Syria to take additional steps against these networks.

For all this progress, Al-Qaida in Iraq remains a significant threat, as do Iranian surrogate militants and Jaysh al-Mahdi militia forces. All retain the intent and capability of carrying out lethal attacks against the Iraqi people, such as the multiple bombings that occurred this week. Al-Qaida in Iraq's use of person-borne improvised explosive devices and its increasing shift towards female suicide bombers remain a particular challenge.

In countering the continued extremist threat, the increased capability of the Iraqi Security Forces has substantially improved the overall security

environment. More than 601,000 personnel now serve in the Iraqi Security Forces — an increase of over 21,000 personnel since our last report to the Council in August.

There are now 165 Iraqi Army combat battalions conducting operations, an increase of four since our last report. Nearly 70 per cent, or 115 of those Iraqi Army combat battalions, are assessed now to be in the lead for operations. The expansion of the Air Force and the Navy lags behind that of the Army. There is nothing surprising about that fact, given the technical platforms that the Air Force must acquire and learn to sustain. While the Air Force and the Navy possess limited capabilities, comprehensive force development strategies are being implemented.

The Air Force is now flying over 300 sorties a week and playing an increasingly active counter-insurgency role, flying surveillance and reconnaissance missions in support of the Iraqi Security Forces and providing important logistics support with its mobility aircraft. The Iraqi Air Force recently graduated its first initial entry pilots, who are now flying, and there will be many more to follow.

The Navy is conducting three times as many patrols as it did last year, with increasing amounts of boarding and searching of vessels coming into Iraqi territorial waters in the northern Arabian Gulf. The Navy has just taken delivery of the first six of 26 modern patrol craft and is expecting the delivery of four large patrol ships in 2009.

The National Police also continues to increase its effectiveness and is now staffed at over 41,000 personnel. The Police continues to stress better ethno-sectarian balance within the force both through recruiting and assignments.

With regard to the coalition role, in September, on the margins of the General Assembly, President Talabani noted with thanks the role of those countries that have contributed to the coalition and NATO Training Mission-Iraq. Currently, coalition members other than the United States contribute over 6,000 force members to the Multinational Force and some 300 personnel to UNAMI. Since our last briefing, approximately 3,000 coalition personnel departed the theatre and others will return home soon.

At the same time, the continued political and economic support of the coalition and the international community will remain critical to the success of Iraqi efforts to build a stable and secure country. MNF-I is continuing to progressively transfer responsibility for security to the Iraqi Government. This process of transitioning security responsibilities to the Iraqi security forces is increasingly being led by Iraqi officials. Thirteen out of 18 provinces are now under provincial Iraqi control. Al-Anbar province — once a stronghold of Al-Qaida in Iraq — transitioned on 1 September, Babil province transitioned on 23 October and Wasit province transitioned on 29 October.

A joint coalition-Iraqi effort is anticipated to assess conditions in and facilitate transition of the remaining provinces: Salahaddin, Tamim, Diyala, and Ninawa within the next several months, culminating with the planned transfer of security authority for Baghdad in June 2009.

The improvement in security has helped to foster political reconciliation. Since our last report, the Iraqi Council of Representatives unanimously passed a provincial elections law that will provide for local elections in 14 of Iraq's 18 provinces early next year. The provincial elections are a major step toward political stabilization. Sunni Arabs, who boycotted the 2005 provincial elections, will compete for political power in provinces that once were the heartland of the insurgency. UNAMI also remains deeply engaged in elections preparation. Indeed, UNAMI's work with the Iraqi Government proved critical in achieving this elections law and we congratulate Mr. de Mistura for that.

We commend UNAMI's plans to expand its footprint in Iraq and will dedicate ourselves to providing assistance, as necessary, so that UNAMI can continue to assist the Iraqi Government with other critical issues, such as the relocation and reintegration of Iraqi refugees and the internally displaced. We strongly support the construction of the proposed United Nations compound in Baghdad and commend the Government of Iraq on its initial pledge of $25 million so that planning for this facility may proceed.

UNAMI is heavily involved in assisting with the resolution of the disputed internal boundaries between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Government of Iraq. The resolution of this dispute is a key step in creating stability for all of Iraq. We

appreciate UNAMI's efforts and assistance on this very important issue.

Iraq has made significant diplomatic gains, with most of the countries in the region normalizing their diplomatic presence in Baghdad. Since our last report, Syria and the Arab League have joined Iraq's other neighbours in naming ambassadors to Iraq — and many of these ambassadors are now on the ground in Baghdad. Other neighbours, including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, have sent high-level delegations to Baghdad. We encourage others in the region to follow their example.

Finally, I want to highlight that negotiations continue between the United States and the Iraqi Government on transitioning our relationship, with a goal of a strong and strategic relationship with Iraq, which respects both countries' sovereignty and serves both countries' interests.

The report of the Secretary-General, which is before the Security Council today, highlights the sustainable progress that has been achieved by the Iraqi Government, with the assistance of the United Nations and the support of the MNF-I and Iraqi security forces.

The United States supports a free, democratic, pluralistic, federal and unified Iraq, and I call upon all parties to renew their commitment to assist the Iraqi Government in continuing the hard work to overcome the challenges that remain.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month.

I would also like to present our thanks to your predecessor, the representative of China, for his distinguished efforts during his presidency in the month of October.

I would like to thank His Excellency Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad for the briefing he presented to the Council on behalf of the multinational force in Iraq (MNF-I) and for its efforts to support security and stability in Iraq.

Our thanks also go to His Excellency Mr. Staffan de Mistura, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq, as well as to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) team in Iraq and New York for their tireless work to assist the Government and people of Iraq.

My delegation took note of the report of the Secretary-General and the work of UNAMI in document S/2008/688 and would like to present the following comments.

On the political and security levels, my Government, according to its constitutional responsibilities to guarantee security and stability for all Iraqi citizens, continues to execute these responsibilities all over Iraq through several security operations in Baghdad and other provinces.

This has led to a tangible security improvement by decreasing the insurgents offensive abilities to target civilians and the Iraqi security forces (ISF). The last security report mentioned that security in the country during the last two months indicates that there were ten activities conducted by the ISF versus one activity by the insurgents.

Furthermore, there has been an 89 per cent decrease of violent activities during the month of August 2008 in comparison to 2006 and 2007. This clearly reflects the Iraqi security forces' ability to control events on the ground.

My Government recognizes that to maintain the security achievements on the ground, it must continue its plans to train the ISF and to provide them with needed weapons and equipments in the best possible way.

The number of officers in the army has increased from 9,800 to 13,911 and the number of soldiers from 116,135 to 217,176. As for the police force, during the most recent period 4,047 officers and 40,004 policemen have also been trained.

The most recent period has witnessed many significant developments in relation to the transfer of security responsibilities from the MNF-I to the Iraqi security forces. The Iraqi Government took over security responsibilities in Al-Anbar Province in September 2008 following the security improvement achieved in that province, which was one of the most violent provinces in western Iraq.

Such violent activities have decreased by approximately 90 per cent. The Iraqi security forces also took over security responsibilities in Babil and Wasit provinces in October 2008, in accordance with

the timetable agreed upon by the Iraqi Government and MNF-I. In total, the Iraqi Government has now taken over security responsibilities in 13 out of 18 Iraqi provinces. This accelerating security improvement in Baghdad and other provinces has assisted a return to normal life for people in most areas of Iraq.

The number of Iraqi displaced families who have returned to their homes in Baghdad has reached 22,442, including 431 Christian families, in October 2008. This improvement is taking place in conjunction with the Iraqi Government's efforts to consolidate national reconciliation between all components of Iraqi society.

Having said that, the Iraqi Government has transferred 98,223 officers and soldiers from the former army to the military service, and the Government has also integrated 51,135 members of the awakening Forces in the civilian and security institutions to bring them to normal life and to play a positive role in the reconstruction in Iraq.

Owing to the terrorist attacks targeting the Christian community in the Mosul province, the Iraqi Government has sent security forces to protect civilians from those attacks. For that purpose, the Interior Ministry sent two brigades to protect families and churches in the city and sent special investigation teams.

Prime Minister al-Maliki announced that Christians in Iraq are an important component of Iraqi society and stressed his commitment to sending emergency assistance and security forces to ensure the protection and safe return of the Christian families to their homes. Accordingly, more than 300 Christian families have returned to their homes after security and stability were restored in their neighbourhoods.

The adoption of the provincial council election law on 24 September 2008 is one of the most significant legislative developments to have taken place in Iraq during the past two months. According to this law, 427 political entities, representing all Iraqi components, will participate in local elections. Article 50 of the provincial council election law has been amended and adopted in order to guarantee equal representation to all minorities in Iraq.

As regards the social and economic situation, tangible improvement in the political and security situation has had a positive effect on the National Development Strategy. Iraqi economic indicators have witnessed a clear improvement during the past few months. The rate of economic growth is expected to reach 8 per cent by the end of 2008, according to International Monetary Fund estimates. The inflation rate has decreased from 16 per cent in 2007 to 12 per cent in the most recent quarter, and the unemployment rate has decreased from 22 per cent in 2007 to 17 per cent during the most recent quarter. These economic indicators reflect a comprehensive improvement in the Iraqi economy.

Investment is a priority for the Iraqi Government's national financial and economic policies. The Government has allocated $19 billion of the national budget for investment activities for all Iraqi ministries and has established a national monitoring mechanism to encourage Iraqi ministries to spend the allocated investment funds on their projects. This has led to an increase in the spending percentage of the ministries' budgets from 24 per cent to 63 per cent.

The Iraqi Government has established a social security network to support various social segments of Iraqi society, including orphans, widows and the unemployed. The Government allocated $812 million to this project, including $76 million for displaced families. This network has witnessed a 25 per cent expansion in the number of individuals included and in the funds allocated to it during November 2008.

Within the framework of economic policies aimed at reconstructing the Iraqi industrial sector, the Ministry of Industry recently signed a number of investment contracts with local, Arab and foreign companies to the value of $1 billion in order to diversify the sources of national income.

The Iraqi Government has adopted new policies to reconstruct and develop the oil industry field. Oil production has increased by 11 per cent, according to the latest reports issued by the Iraqi Oil Ministry, and the Iraqi Government has joined the international Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative to place a monitoring mechanism on oil revenue and on ways of spending it.

In the area of basic services, the Iraqi Government has reduced the number of people deprived of water and sewage systems to 10 per cent in the urban areas and 30 per cent in the rural areas. The production of electricity has risen significantly during

the past three months, and the Iraqi Government increased the funds allocated to building new power stations.

Within the framework of Government efforts to combat financial and administrative corruption, Iraq ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption in 2008. The Iraqi Government started cooperating with the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to implement the new anti-corruption programme in Iraq, which was adopted by the United Nations in September 2008 to strengthen the Government's anti-corruption activities in the next five years.

The Iraqi Government is keen to promote a new culture of respecting human rights in Iraqi society, based on the concepts of tolerance and mutual acceptance among the various components of Iraqi society. The Government achieved significant progress in establishing a national system to monitor human rights violations through professional teams in the Ministry of Human Rights. This mechanism revealed many cases of human rights violations and, to guarantee a high level of commitment to human rights within the Iraqi security institutions, the Ministry of Interior dismissed 27,690 officers, and another 4,012 are to be put on trial for their involvement in cases of human rights violations.

On the regional and international levels, the Iraqi Government continues its efforts within the framework of the support mechanism, which was adopted at the expanded meetings of Foreign Ministers of neighbouring countries of Iraq, held in Sharm el-Sheikh and Istanbul, to monitor and coordinate the work of the committees on refugees, energy and security. The energy committee held its last meeting on 11 October 2008, and the refugees committee plans to hold its next meeting in Amman on 15 November 2008. The security coordination committee meeting will be held in Damascus on 22 and 23 November 2008. In this regard, I would like to stress my Government's commitment to full cooperation with the neighbouring countries to reach solutions on all issues of mutual interest.

The last few months witnessed several important official visits to Iraq, such as the visit on 8 July of the Turkish Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to promote cooperation between Iraq and Turkey and which established a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council between the two countries. Other visits were made to Iraq by His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan, on 11 August; the Lebanese Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Fouad Siniora, on 20 August; the Egyptian Foreign Minister, His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit on 5 October; and His Highness Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahayan of the United Arab Emirates, on 7 October. These visits highlight the significance of continued cooperation with Iraq's regional partners in securing common interests.

Following the Iraqi Government's efforts to encourage Arab States to reopen their embassies in Baghdad, several Arab ambassadors arrived in Baghdad for that purpose, including those of Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Syria and the United Arab Emirates. The League of Arab States appointed a new representative to Baghdad on 6 October. The Organization of the Islamic Conference has also reopened its offices in Iraq.

With regard to the International Compact with Iraq, the Iraqi Government, following the first review conference, which was held in Stockholm, took many steps to enhance national policies to meet all the requirements through the shared monitoring matrix. In this regard, my delegation would like to encourage all Arab countries to help their brothers in Iraq by forgiving Iraq's debts and reducing the percentage of the compensation imposed on Iraq due to the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, a crime committed by the former dictatorial regime. My Government welcomes the agreement of the Kuwaiti Government to address the issue of compensation through bilateral negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations Compensation Commission.

With regard to cooperation between Iraq, the United Nations and our brothers in Kuwait, the Iraqi Government invited Mr. Gennady Tarasov, High-level Coordinator for missing Kuwaitis and Kuwaiti property, to visit Baghdad from 12 to 15 October 2008. The visit was successful, and Mr. Tarasov met with high-level Iraqi official to address this issue.

As a demonstration of my Government's keenness to facilitate UNAMI's execution of its mandate, the Iraqi Government has decided to allocate $25 million from this year's budget to contribute to the cost of building the UNAMI headquarters in Baghdad.

This reflects our great appreciation of UNAMI's role in Iraq and our readiness to cooperate with the United Nations. I would like also to confirm my Government's readiness to provide the needed protection to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq.

In conclusion, I would like to stress my Government's gratitude for UNAMI's role in Iraq and for Mr. de Mistura's support, which is offered upon the Government's request and based on mutually agreed mechanisms. I would like to reiterate our thanks to the support of the multinational forces in Iraq for the people and the Government of Iraq.

Mr. Ettalhi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to begin by thanking Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his valuable briefing and to extend our high appreciation for his efforts. We would also like to thank His Excellency Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, the representative of the United States, for the useful presentation he made on the work of the Multinational Forces. We welcome the presence of our brother, Mr. Hamid Al Bayati, the Permanent Representative of Iraq, and thank him for his briefing as well.

The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya expresses its satisfaction with the continued improvement of the security situation in Iraq. The decrease in the instances of violence in the country has already been highlighted by Mr. de Mistura in his briefing and by the figures cited by Mr. Khalilzad in his presentation. There has been an increase in the Iraqi forces' assumption of security tasks from the Multinational Force. Additional United States forces have withdrawn without affecting the security situation. Internally displaced persons returned to their homes in growing numbers during the three months of June, July and August. All of those facts are, without a doubt, indicators that the security situation is moving in the right direction, as we continue to hope it will.

We also welcome the political developments and progress in other sectors in the fraternal country of Iraq during the period under discussion. The electoral law for the governorates was adopted, as the hurdles that had earlier prevented its adoption were overcome. There have been positive developments in terms of the voter registration update, a date set for elections in 14 governorates, the situation with regard to the "awakening councils" and support for the rule of law and justice in Iraq. In addition, there have been improvements in the level of social services provided, particularly in the provision of food supplies. As indicated by Mr. Al Bayati, economic indicators have improved. Other positive issues are highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/688).

All these developments provide reason for optimism; we are confident that they have had a positive impact on the direct and indirect bilateral relations of Iraq with its neighbouring countries. We have witnessed the return of foreign ambassadors to Iraq, in addition to high-level visits, continued regional dialogue and attempts to address pending issues between Iraq and some of its neighbours. All those elements are positive indications that the situation in general is moving in the right direction.

However, Iraqis and the international community must still overcome certain challenges. Critical issues now lying dormant must be addressed through a comprehensive approach. For example, the security situation, despite a relative improvement, remains fragile. Events have taken place in Mosul targeting Christians. Some Iraqis are still reluctant to return to their homes. Between 1,000 and 2,500 Iraqis per month refuse to return, and some 20,000 have sought asylum in other countries during the first eight months of this year — the highest number in the world to do so. Internally displaced persons returning to their homes have faced real difficulties in terms of stability, which has led the head of a committee on forcibly displaced people to claim that the Government and the security forces have had a hand to play in the situation. The explosions that have occurred this week in Iraq are disheartening and disquieting. They highlight the vulnerability of the security situation.

We have said many times before in this Council that the situation in Iraq will never become stable without achieving national reconciliation, the three most important aspects of which — all requiring immediate and urgent progress — involve first, an end to foreign occupation. The people of Iraq have always rejected and resisted occupation. Continued occupation in any form will be a divisive factor, thereby contributing to instability and possibly causing a setback in the security situation.

Secondly, an agreement on the constitutional review process must be reached. The current Iraqi Constitution, in the words of Mr. al-Maliki, the Iraqi Prime Minister, might have been drawn up in an atmosphere of fear. Unfortunately, we have entrenched

those fears and compromised our aspirations. To quote paragraph 17 of the report of the Secretary-General:

> "In mid-July, the Constitutional Review Committee of the Iraqi Parliament submitted its second report to the Presidency of Iraq. The report outlined a number of key issues within the constitutional review process on which the Committee has, thus far, been unable to reach a political consensus."

We hope that all parties concerned will work on promoting dialogue in the spirit of the sincere national desire that we have always known to be prevalent among Iraqis, so that they can draft a constitution that reflects the national and legitimate realities and aspirations of Iraq, thus establishing Iraq as a democratic Arab country that guarantees the rights of all its social groups and minorities.

Thirdly, there are issues that, in our view, are considered hallmarks of any national reconciliation process. In the case of Iraq, these include the demarcation of the internal boundaries among the governorates. Such efforts should be buttressed by a true and continuous effort in the field of development, covering all the Iraqi regions and resulting in a positive impact on the Iraqi people.

Paragraphs 40 to 45 of the report of the Secretary-General address the question of human rights. The report points to some improvements in the field of human rights as a result of the overall improvement in the security environment. However, the report also stresses that serious and systematic human rights violations persist. By way of example, the report cites the assassination of journalists and political activists and the arbitrary attempts to impact the demographic composition of some Iraqi governorates. These include, of course, the recent events targeting Christians in Iraq. The report points out that the number of detainees has decreased from 24,000 in 2007 to 18,000 currently. While we welcome and encourage that trend, we hope that the Multinational Force would positively respond to the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in respecting the provisions of international humanitarian law.

It is also regrettable that the report confirms that many of those released by the Multinational Force have been rearrested by the Government of Iraq. According to the report of the Secretary-General, there are currently more than 27,000 detainees in Iraqi Government prisons. We also share the concerns expressed by the Secretary-General in paragraphs 43 and 44 of his report.

It is also disquieting that the Multinational Force in Iraq crossed the Syrian border for the first time since 2003. On 26 October, those forces attacked the village of Sukkariyah, within Syria's borders, resulting in many civilian casualties. Not only is that a violation of the Charter of the United Nations, but it will no doubt raise tensions in a region that should be spared any further causes of tension. We do not believe that such an act can in any way contribute to Iraq's stability.

In conclusion, my country highly appreciates the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and its positive contributions to the political situation, to national and regional dialogue and to supporting constitutional processes and human rights. We also welcome the signing of a strategy between the United Nations and Iraq's Government concerning the assistance to be provided by the Organization to that country.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak also on behalf of the European Union (EU).

First, I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura for his briefing and, above all, the efforts he is making on the ground with his team. He is putting all his determination, tenacity and courage into these efforts, for which we are grateful. I also wish to thank the Permanent Representative of the United States for his briefing, as well as our colleague the Permanent Representative of Iraq for his statement.

The European Union would like to see a secure, stable, democratic, prosperous and unified Iraq in which human rights are respected. The EU is committed to Iraq's independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

The European Union welcomes both the progress achieved in improving the security situation and the steps taken towards national reconciliation with the adoption of the law on provincial elections, the holding of which is essential to strengthening democracy and the rule of law. The European Union takes note of the adoption of an amendment to that law that stipulates the conditions for the representation of persons

belonging to minorities. We hope that the elections will be held as planned in early 2009. As the Secretary-General has indicated in his reports, the priority challenge to be met is that of the national reconciliation and constitutional review process. All of us in the international community have an important role to play in helping the Iraqi people.

The European Union approves of the central role taken by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and welcomes the progress achieved in implementing resolutions 1770 (2007) and 1830 (2008). The European Union encourages further close cooperation between UNAMI and the Iraqi authorities. In that regard, the European Union would like UNAMI to continue advising and supporting the Iraqi Government on its political reforms, which, as I have just mentioned, represent the major challenge.

The European Union remains concerned about the human rights situation, in particular that of women, children and persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities. The EU welcomes the commitment made by the Iraqi Government to take action in that area. The EU also supports the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and reiterates the need to provide special protection to all vulnerable groups.

The European Union commends the work of the United Nations with regard to the humanitarian situation in Iraq. The European Union is concerned about the situation of displaced Iraqis inside Iraq and Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries, in particular in Jordan and Syria. Those countries deserve our gratitude for the hospitality and solidarity they are providing. We reiterate that the Government of Iraq and the international community have an obligation to protect and assist displaced Iraqis inside Iraq and in neighbouring countries by addressing their immediate and foreseeable needs and ensuring their safety. We encourage the Iraqi Government to use its resources to help neighbouring countries to cope with the additional burden of refugees.

Lastly, notwithstanding the decisions to be taken with regard to the mandate of the Multinational Force, the European Union underscores the importance it attaches to maintaining an adequate level of security that, as called for by the Secretary-General, enables the effective functioning of the United Nations in Iraq.

The European Union thus notes with satisfaction that a number of neighbours and partners in the region have honoured the commitments undertaken in the final communiqué of the Ministerial Conference of the Neighbouring Countries of Iraq, which was held in April 2008 in Kuwait, and have increased their representation in Baghdad. Constructive engagement by Iraq's neighbours and partners in the region remains essential for peace and stability. The EU encourages all of Iraq's neighbours and partners to do the same. The European Union continues to support the process that Iraq's neighbours have initiated and is ready to participate in the forthcoming expanded ministerial conference.

The European Union would like to actively participate in efforts to further stabilize Iraq. In particular, I would like to emphasize the importance of our renewed commitment as regards the rule of law through community assistance efforts by the European Security and Defence Policy Rule of Law Mission and the bilateral programmes of member States. In that regard, at the General Affairs Council meeting held on 10 November 2008, European Union member States agreed to extend the mandate of the European Union Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq, with effect from June 2009. That will enable the Mission to conduct progressive and experimental pilot activities, where security conditions permit, in the area of the rule of law on Iraqi territory.

The European Union also welcomes the major progress made in the negotiations on a cooperation and trade agreement and expresses its determination to conclude those negotiations as quickly as possible. Such an outcome will help to establish the first contractual relations between the European Union and Iraq and allow us enter into a structured and regular political dialogue that is both technical and political.

Finally, the European Union remains committed to develop its partnership with Iraq in compliance with the principles of the International Compact with Iraq. The EU welcomes the meeting held last May in Stockholm for the first International Compact with Iraq Annual Review Conference. The EU encourages the progress made in its implementation and invites all parties to honour the commitments made on that occasion.

Sir John Sawers (United Kingdom): May I begin by joining colleagues in thanking Special Representative de Mistura for his briefing on the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2008/688). I would

ask him through you, Mr. President, if he could pass on our thanks to the United Nations team working in Iraq. They continue to do excellent work and have played a really key role in the progress we have seen, and which was so fully reported in Mr. de Mistura's briefing. I am also grateful to Ambassador Khalilzad for his presentation on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I), to which the United Kingdom continues to contribute over 4,000 troops.

While Iraq still needs to overcome some serious challenges, it is with pleasure that we note the continued progress over the past quarter. We have heard about it in some detail from previous speakers, but it is worth recalling some of the key steps forward.

In terms of security, this period has seen a further decrease in reported incidents of violence to a level as low as it was five years ago. The Iraq security forces have demonstrated increasing capability, as reflected in the fact that Iraq now has lead responsibility for security in 13 out of the 18 provinces. Further process in national reconciliation is required in order to ensure that those gains are sustained, and in that respect the Iraqi Government's assumption of responsibility for support to the Awakening movement is an important step.

The United Kingdom shares concerns about the intimidation and violence towards Iraq's minority communities, for example the Christian community in Mosul. We welcome the swift action taken by the Government of Iraq and are encouraged by the reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees this week that, as a result of that action, many families are now returning to the area.

On the political front, the passage of the provincial election law in September was a significant step forward, as Mr. de Mistura said. The holding of the elections will mark another milestone in democratic progress in Iraq and should also contribute to the causes of reconciliation and good governance by giving those who boycotted previous elections the chance to be represented in local administrations. While the details of the quota for guaranteed seats for minorities have proved to be contentious, it is welcome that Iraq's political leaders have acknowledged the principle that minority rights should be protected in that way. We value and commend the work undertaken by United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in terms of both electoral assistance and in facilitating final agreement on the election law.

The United Kingdom has consistently urged increased regional and international engagement with Iraq and we warmly welcome the recent arrival of ambassadors from five regional countries. We also welcome the important support provided by UNAMI to the Iraq Neighbours Group process. As a participant in that process, the United Kingdom hopes that it can deliver concrete improvements in cooperation between Iraq and its neighbours on security, energy and humanitarian issues. Increased trade and investment between Iraq and its neighbours can also make an important contribution to stability and prosperity in the region, and that should be one focus for further engagement.

We take this opportunity to reiterate that external support for illegal armed groups outside the political process in Iraq is unacceptable. We continue to encourage all those who have influence on the parties who provide such support to press for it to come to an end.

As the European Union presidency has indicated, the European Union attaches importance to a constructive and forward-looking relationship with Iraq. The recent decision to extend the European Union Rule of Law Mission for Iraq, which offers training and capacity-building in the criminal justice system, shows the European Union's continued commitment to support the rule of law in Iraq.

I would like to close by outlining my own Government's support for the Government of Iraq. As set out by the British Prime Minister on 22 July this year, our armed forces in southern Iraq remain focused on two remaining key commitments: to train and mentor the Fourteenth Division of the Iraqi Army and to prepare Basra International Airport for transfer to Iraqi control. We remain on course to fulfil those tasks in the coming months, following which our military mission will change fundamentally to a normal bilateral defence relationship of the kind we have with other friends and partners in the region. We are in discussion with the Government of Iraq over a bilateral agreement that will provide the legal basis for both the fulfilment of those outstanding commitments and for the longer-term defence relationship. We look forward to its successful conclusion before the end of this year.

The transition in our presence will mark a new chapter in our relationship with and our support for Iraq. We look forward to having a close and substantive bilateral relationship, while continuing to offer political and practical support to Iraqi-led efforts to build State capacity, improve security and the rule of law, and deliver economic opportunity for the Iraqi people.

As conditions in Iraq improve, a close and productive relationship between it and international organizations becomes increasingly important to allow Iraq to achieve its full potential. The United Nations has led the way in that area and we remain strongly supportive of the role that UNAMI is playing on a range of issues in Iraq. We welcome the Government of Iraq's decision to provide the United Nations with financial support to build a permanent mission in Iraq, and we believe that this reflects the United Nations key role in the future development of a stable, secure and prosperous Iraq.

Mr. Terzi di Sant'Agata (Italy): I, too, would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura, for his very informative briefing today. I would also like to commend his efforts towards the significant results that United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) is achieving in supporting the Government of Iraq, as he described. I would ask him to please also pass on our congratulations and best wishes for the continuation of their important work in Iraq to all UNAMI staff. UNAMI, as underlined by the Special Representative, has an essential role in addressing a number of very complex and significant questions. Therefore, ensuring the safety of the United Nations presence in Iraq remains a high priority for the United Nations and the Security Council.

I would like to thank Ambassador Khalilzad for his briefing on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I) and Ambassador Al Bayati for his statement. Let me also associate myself with the statement delivered by Ambassador Ripert on behalf of the European Union.

We share the Secretary-General's assessment of the situation in Iraq in his latest report (S/2008/688). The Government of Iraq has made substantial progress in the security situation. The increasing autonomy of the Iraqi Security Forces is also a positive development. In that regard, I would like to note that Italy remains committed to helping Iraq build its security capacities through the NATO Training Mission. At the same time, I agree with the Secretary-General that this progress will remain fragile unless it is backed up by a national reconciliation process. All the Iraqi political forces should be encouraged to continue the political dialogue in order to solve outstanding issues and reach agreed solutions on such fundamental questions as the structure of the Iraqi institutions and the sharing of power and resources. The ongoing constitutional review is of the utmost importance.

The Iraqi political situation seems to be moving in the right direction. I refer in particular to the adoption of a new provincial electoral law, a major step forward that shows once again the commitment of the Iraqi political forces to democracy and dialogue. We look forward to the holding of provincial elections, another step in building a democratic Iraq that will empower representative local leaders and give a chance to all Iraqi political forces to remain engaged. The elections must take place in a fair and transparent manner, free of interference or intimidation from armed groups.

I would like to welcome in particular the adoption of a law that provides for reserved seats for Iraqi minorities. The representation of minorities is a key element, especially in a country as diverse and rich in cultures and communities as Iraq. The affirmation of such a principle is of great importance.

Another top priority is the issue of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Their safe and voluntary return home must be a priority. The international community should support the Iraqi Government's actions as well as that of the host countries in that endeavour. There are encouraging signs, with some refugees and IDPs starting to return voluntarily. That progress must be consolidated.

A few days ago, my Government organized a conference on the issue of militias, attended by representatives of all the major Iraqi political forces. The message from that meeting was clear: There is no place for militias and armed groups in a democratic society. The disbandment of those armed groups that still exist in Iraq outside State control and the integration of their members into Iraq's legitimate security forces and civilian life are therefore essential to the stabilization of the country.

The development of a viable private sector is not only an economic priority but also a political one. It would diversify the economy and provide the alternative revenue sources needed to break the State budget's dependency on fluctuations in the oil market. The approval of a hydrocarbons law is thus a clear priority. A vital private sector is a central element of a democratic system and, in that regard, Italy is committed to cooperating with Iraq within the framework of the International Compact with Iraq and of the bilateral friendship and cooperation agreement signed in 2007.

My country has been at the side of the Iraqi people and institutions in their efforts to build a democratic State that is at peace with itself and with its neighbours. I should like to conclude by affirming that commitment.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, I would like to thank the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Mr. de Mistura, for presenting the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Iraq and the work of the United Nations there (S/2008/688), and also for his leadership of the United Nations Mission in the very complex conditions of today's Iraq.

We also note the statement by the Permanent Representative of Iraq, Mr. Al Bayati, who talked about the work of his Government to stabilize the situation in the country, the progress achieved and the remaining problems. We are also grateful to the Permanent Representative of the United States of America, Mr. Khalilzad, for his briefing on the activities of the Multinational Force.

Overall, we think that the report of the Secretary-General objectively reflects the general political, security and socio-economic situation in Iraq, and we agree with most of its conclusions. We note with satisfaction the drop in violent incidents undermining stability in the country and the consolidation and improved performance and effectiveness of the Iraqi Security Forces, as shown by the United States military command's transfer of control of Babil and Wasit Provinces and their capitals, Hilla and Kut, to Iraqi forces in October.

The fact that only 5 out of 18 governorates are under the control of the coalition forces reflects the positive dynamic in the country's security situation. What has been achieved is, to a large extent, the result of the measures taken by the Government of Iraq, led by the Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki. Nevertheless, it is a little early to toast victory, because there are still sources of tension that continue to have an impact on strengthening stability in the country.

In that regard, we would like to express our concern with respect to the flare-ups of violence that have occurred recently in Mosul, Baghdad, Baqubah and other Iraqi towns, causing the deaths of dozens of peaceful civilians. That seems to confirm the view of the Secretary-General on the fragility of the situation in the country. We strongly condemn those acts of violence. We emphasize that it is impossible to achieve the long-term stabilization of Iraq by force alone. Steps are needed to strengthen inter-Iraqi dialogue among all forces that reject terrorism as a way to solve political problems.

In that context, the amendments to the provincial election law adopted on 3 November are of particular importance. They guarantee national and religious minorities a mandatory quota of representation in local councils, as well as an increase in the number of women in Government structures.

We note the active role of UNAMI in achieving a consensus among the different political forces in Iraq on that important issue. We believe that elections to the local councils will be an important step towards retaining the unity and territorial integrity of the country and achieving national harmony and reconciliation among all Iraqis.

Together with the Secretary-General, we call on the Iraqi forces to take decisive steps to enhance the system of human rights protection in the country so as to guarantee respect for the rights of all Iraqis. We welcome Baghdad's ratification of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. We welcome the efforts of UNAMI to solve the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons. Unfortunately, that situation in that respect remains difficult, and we would like to thank the Governments of Syria and Jordan for having welcomed many tens of thousands of Iraqi citizens on their territories.

We welcome the efforts of UNAMI to encourage the development of relations between Iraq and its neighbouring countries, which has led to the opening of several embassies in Baghdad and, in a broader context, encouraged contact between the leaders of Iraq

and their counterparts in the countries of the Near and Middle East.

Against that background, we consider that the recent operation undertaken by United States forces in Iraq, which violated the borders of Syria and conducted a raid on the outskirts of Abu Kamal, considerably undermined efforts to achieve stabilization in Iraq and the Middle East as a whole.

Iraq faces the serious challenges of nation-building and national reconciliation. In the near future, it will have to decide on the future nature and status of the presence of international forces on its territory. In that regard, the Russian Federation is sympathetic to the legitimate demands of Iraq for guaranteed sovereignty over its territory.

We support the efforts of the international community to provide economic assistance to Baghdad in the context of the International Compact with Iraq. It is well known that Russia is providing bilateral assistance to Iraq in rebuilding its economy. I would like particularly to emphasize that Russian experts are currently present on the ground in Iraq, despite the very complicated conditions and risks in the country, and are working on building and rebuilding Iraqi energy facilities.

At the same time, we are convinced that any plans of the international community to promote Iraq's economic recovery will face serious difficulties unless they are bolstered by additional political steps aimed at ensuring sustainable normalization of the situation in the country.

Mr. Grauls (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Representative de Mistura for his presentation, which was very clear, comprehensive and, I would add, very convincing. I would also like to thank Ambassador Khalilzad for his briefing on the Multinational Force. In addition, I welcome the participation of Ambassador Al Bayati in our debate and would like to associate my delegation with the statement made by Ambassador Ripert of France on behalf of the European Union.

The past two years have been marked by considerable progress in the situation in Iraq. There has been progress in the security, political and humanitarian situations, from which the population is beginning to benefit and which, in particular, has led to a welcome normalization of the relations of Iraq with its neighbours. That progress has required the support of the international community and regional actors, but it has been brought about above all by the Iraqis themselves and their elected Government, led by Prime Minister al-Maliki.

However, that progress should not blind us to the problems that remain or lead us to forget our responsibility towards the outstanding challenges. In that regard, I would like to mention three points.

First, with regard to the security situation, Belgium welcomes the improvement in security and the increasing role played by the Iraqi Security Forces in ensuring public order. First and foremost, that is reflected in the direct control that they now exercise over security in 13 of the country's 18 provinces, as well as by their resolute action against militia activity and the move to integrate the Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi security forces — two changes that should strengthen the prerogative of the rule of law to exercise the monopoly of the security forces over the use of force.

However, the bloody attacks of recent days in Mosul, Baghdad and elsewhere remind us that, for Iraqis, daily security is still often very relative and remains an obstacle to the return of thousands of people who have been forced to flee their homes. Moreover, there is a real fear that the upcoming provincial elections could be an additional motive for violent attacks by criminal gangs who are still rampant.

We encourage the Iraqi authorities to continue their efforts and to complement their achievements with robust action in protecting fundamental human rights, including in detention. Just as important as re-establishing order is guaranteeing the rights of each citizen, which will earn the authorities the essential confidence and support of the population.

Secondly, with regard to political reconciliation, Belgium welcomes the political agreement that made possible the adoption of the law on the upcoming provincial elections. Following the constitutional referendum and the 2005 elections, those elections will represent a new step in the consolidation of a democracy open to all Iraqis. In that spirit, we welcome in particular the inclusion of provisions for the representation of women and minorities. Of greater concern is the discussion on the distribution of power and the sharing of assets, which have been slow in coming about. An agreement on those issues is, however, an essential foundation for the stable

coexistence of all of the different Iraqi communities and for a prosperity that is as genuine as it is equitably distributed. We thus call upon all parties to show the will necessary to achieve a compromise.

In that context and given the tension and increased violence in the areas of the disputed internal boundaries, we welcome the technical assistance provided by UNAMI that was mentioned by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in his briefing. We encourage all sides to make use of that assistance.

Thirdly, on the issue of human rights, Belgium encourages the Iraqi authorities to increase their efforts to take advantage of the improved security situation to combat the serious violations of human rights that continue to affect the most vulnerable populations. In response to the events of the past summer, we reiterate our unequivocal condemnation of the campaign of violence against the Christian community of Mosul, while we also note with satisfaction measures taken by Prime Minister al-Maliki.

In the few weeks remaining until the end of the mandate of the multinational force in Iraq, Belgium reminds the Council that it is the Council's task to ensure that the mandate of the United Nations be carried out under secure conditions. We also welcome the decision by the Government of Iraq to facilitate the construction of a new United Nations headquarters in Baghdad by providing land, and the announcement of a substantial financial contribution.

Finally, Belgium must reaffirm its appreciation for the excellent work — courageous and professional and carried out under difficult circumstances — by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and by Mr. de Mistura personally. Mr de Mistura will continue to benefit from the full and unequivocal support of Belgium in completing his mandate.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): I would like to begin by joining previous speakers in thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his comprehensive briefing and the Secretary-General for his report (S/2008/688). My delegation also thanks the representative of the United States for his statement on behalf of the multinational force in Iraq. We also greatly appreciate the information provided by the Permanent Representative of Iraq.

We are encouraged by the overall improvement in the security situation in Iraq. We believe that this accomplishment will provide Iraq with the opportunity to make further progress in its political processes and economic development. It is critical that the encouraging achievement be maintained and strengthened. In that regard, my delegation welcomes the continued efforts by the Government of Iraq to build the capacity of the Iraqi security forces. The recent transfer of security responsibilities from the multinational force to the Iraqi army in some governorates is a sign of the increased capacity of the Iraqi security forces.

My delegation also recognizes that, despite the improvement, Iraq continues to face serious security challenges. We believe that addressing the persistence of security threats will require not only military measures but also the promotion of dialogue and national reconciliation across political, ethnic and sectarian lines. Peace and stability in Iraq could also be underpinned by tangible progress in socio-economic reconstruction, strong steps to bolster the human rights protection system to guarantee the rights of Iraqi citizens and the promotion of good governance and the rule of law.

Electoral democracy is an important part of political stability in Iraq. My delegation, in that regard, is particularly encouraged by the adoption of the provincial election law in September 2008, which will serve as the legal basis for the conduct of the forthcoming provincial elections in early 2009. We are hopeful that those elections will advance political dialogue, establish representative provincial councils and empower community leaders to meet the needs of local citizens in cooperation with the Government of Iraq.

In ensuring political stability and economic progress, Iraq will continue to require the support of countries in the region. In that regard, we welcome the increasing cooperation between Iraq and other countries as well as institutions in the region. We are of the view that the sustained work of the working groups on Iraqi border security, refugees and energy could further enhance such cooperation.

We continue to attach primary importance to the International Compact with Iraq, serving as a new partnership between Iraq and the international community in order to achieve peace, consolidation

and comprehensive development. We recognize the importance of the increased presence of international agencies in Baghdad and at the provincial level, in order to support various initiatives within the framework of the Compact. We therefore commend the United Nations agencies, such as the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Health Organization for establishing a permanent presence in Iraq.

The humanitarian situation of the Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) remains a matter of concern to my delegation. International support aimed at meeting their urgent needs remains critical. The United Nations Assistance Strategy for Iraq signed in August 2008 by the United Nations and the Government of Iraq should provide a framework not only for enhancing economic development but also for mitigating the difficulties that Iraqi refugees and IDPs continue to face. We welcome the fact that increasing numbers of refugees and IDPs are returning to Iraq and the measures taken by the Government of Iraq to facilitate their return.

We remain concerned over the continued incidence of civilian casualties in Iraq. In that regard, my Government underlines the importance of respect for international humanitarian and human rights law and for appropriate measures to ensure the protection of civilians.

Indonesia continues to attach primary importance to UNAMI's role and contribution to the efforts of the Government of Iraq in reconstruction and development, conducting elections and promoting human rights, good governance and the rule of law. We commend UNAMI for its continued support for the enhancement of relations between Iraq and the countries of the region with a view to promoting an agenda of mutual collaboration and partnership.

Finally, in light of the fifth anniversary of the heinous terrorist attack on the United Nations office in Baghdad in 2003, my delegation would like to pay tribute to the staff members and others who became the victims of the heinous attack. Their dedication and sacrifices will always be remembered.

Mr. Jurica (Croatia): May I begin by extending our welcome to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. de Mistura, and expressing our appreciation for the ongoing efforts and commitment that he and his team are devoting to fulfilling the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Allow me also to take the opportunity to thank Ambassador Khalilzad of the United States for his presentation on behalf of the multinational force and Ambassador Al Bayati of Iraq for his presentation today.

While Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered by France on behalf of the European Union, allow me to make a few additional observations. The gains achieved on the political and the security fronts this year, with the assistance of UNAMI and the support of the multinational force, underpin a remarkable process of transformation of Iraq towards a democratic, stable, secure and prosperous country. The democratically elected Government of Iraq is extending its authority and security presence in a growing number of provinces. The socio-economic situation is improving, while microeconomic indicators point to an expanding economy.

The recent adoption of the provincial election law has opened the way for provincial elections to take place in early 2009. That would be an excellent opportunity to further consider the progress achieved. It is important that the elections be well-prepared as well as fair and inclusive. We salute the important contributions that UNAMI has been making in that regard, including its facilitation role on the issue of minority representation in the provincial councils.

A secure environment is critical to the holding of successful elections. The recent incidents of violence, including an intimidation campaign against Christians in Mosul, are unsettling. We deplore all attempts to reignite the conflict, and we express our condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the recent attacks.

However, that should not be allowed to overshadow the overall security gains witnessed over the past year. We are encouraged to observe a continuing period of improved stability, and we welcome it. We are also pleased to hear that the responsibility for security has been handed over to the Government of Iraq in more than two thirds of its provinces. The Iraqi Government has demonstrated its increasing capabilities, including the ability to address security challenges. We welcome the beginning of the integration of ex-combatants into Government

functions and recognize that that is a long-term effort that is essential in order to create impartial and non-sectarian security forces that enjoy the trust and respect of all Iraqi communities.

We have taken note of the belated discussions under way between Iraq and the United States, and we hope that they will lead to the rapid conclusion of a status-of-forces agreement before the end of this year, leaving no security gaps.

Security is also a precondition for the reconstruction and development of the country. Last May in Stockholm, the international community reaffirmed its commitment to continuing to work in partnership with the Iraqi Government within the framework of the Iraqi Compact. We welcome the signing of the United Nations Assistance Strategy for Iraq, notably its focus on mobilizing Iraq's resources and on capacity-building.

Iraq has vast economic potential, which will be translated into improvements in infrastructure and in essential services for all Iraqi citizens. To echo the Secretary-General's remarks, the mobilization of Iraq's abundant economic and human resources can provide further impetus to the national reconciliation effort.

Dialogue with and the constructive engagement of Iraq's neighbours are other critical components in the long-term stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq. We salute and encourage the growing regional diplomatic engagement, including through the reopening of embassies of regional countries in Baghdad.

National reconciliation remains a priority in Iraq. In order to overcome sectarian violence, cross-community cooperation efforts should be encouraged at all levels. Iraqi leaders have demonstrated the ability to work together and move beyond sectarianism. A number of important legislative milestones have been reached this year. We hope to see similar progress on the issue of hydrocarbon resources, the implementation of article 140 of the Constitution and the constitutional revision process.

We encourage the extension of UNAMI's presence in Iraq. UNAMI has proved to be a positive force in advancing national reconciliation, facilitating political consensus, engaging with the issues of minority representation and disputed internal boundaries, promoting regional dialogue, offering substantial electoral assistance, promoting human rights and supporting reconstruction and development. It has our full and continuing support.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): On behalf of my delegation, I would like to thank Mr. de Mistura, head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), for his detailed briefing. I also thank Ambassador Khalilzad of the United States for his report on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq. We welcome the participation of the delegation of Iraq in this debate and thank Ambassador Al Bayati for his statement.

We are approaching the end of 2008 amid intertwining achievements and challenges with regard to the situation in Iraq. My delegation notes with encouragement Iraq's continued and measured progress across a vast spectrum, including a further decrease in security incidents and violence, the long-awaited adoption of the provincial council elections law, the general observance of Moqtada al-Sadr's ceasefire, the formal transfer of security responsibilities to the Iraqi army in 13 governorates and the accelerated return of internally displaced persons and refugees. We are also heartened to see the incremental macroeconomic improvements in domestic consumption, public expenditure, budget execution, private sector reform, foreign and local investment and external debt settlement.

The aforementioned progress, however, has not eclipsed the magnitude of the challenges that remain pertinent. While the Iraqi economy continues to grow, thanks in large part to oil revenues, there are still pressing demands to devote more resources and capacity to generating employment, ensuring food security and better access to public services, promoting social welfare and environmental protection, advancing the legislative agenda and constitutional review, curbing the illicit use of weapons and combating organized crime, promoting disarmament and demobilizing and reintegrating ex-combatants. The latest series of incidents involving sectarian violence and suicide bombings in Baghdad, Kirkuk and a number of other provinces reminds us that security gains are still fragile. As reported by the Secretary-General, the deteriorated living conditions of vulnerable groups, most of whom are women, children, refugees or internally displaced persons, deserve the continued attention and cooperation of all relevant stakeholders in order to serve the legitimate interests of

Iraqi civilians in compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law.

As in any other country emerging from a devastating war, the quest for durable peace and sustainable development in Iraq should be a nationally owned process relying on a harmonious combination of various political, security and socioeconomic parameters and requiring the united efforts of all segments of the population. My delegation calls on all parties in Iraq to accord the highest priority to national interests, to renounce all potentially destabilizing acts and to jointly shoulder the national agenda of reconciliation and dialogue, political stabilization and socioeconomic reform, thus creating the most conducive environment possible for the provincial elections scheduled for January 2009, as well as for the country's long-term peace, stability and prosperity.

In order to help Iraq to maximize its internal strengths and to fully integrate into the world community, United Nations agencies, neighbouring countries and the international community can and should play a more incisive role. In that connection, while we welcome the signing of the United Nations Assistance Strategy for Iraq 2008-2010, my delegation supports every United Nations effort to truly become a promoter of development, a coordinator of international contributions and a catalyst for improvements in the living conditions of the Iraqi people. We commend the efforts undertaken by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) since the renewal of its mandate, notably in helping the people of Iraq to advance political dialogue and confidence-building, to resolve the status of Kirkuk and other contested internal boundaries, to extend electoral assistance, to support the constitutional review process and to facilitate the regional dialogue process.

In concluding, my delegation notes with appreciation the continued engagement of regional countries and the international community in leveraging Iraq's reconstruction, development and reintegration, especially through the normalization of external bilateral relations and within broader frameworks such as the International Compact with Iraq, the expanded ministerial meetings and the regional working groups on energy, refugees and security. We hope that all parties concerned will take further concrete steps to consolidate and contribute to that mutually beneficial partnership on the basis of respect for the political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): My delegation greatly appreciates the briefing given by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for which we thank him. We also thank Ambassador Khalilzad for his briefing on the activities of the Multinational Force. We also thank our colleague the Permanent Representative of Iraq for the very useful information that we have received.

From all of these briefings, we can conclude that the overall situation in Iraq continues to improve, even though it is still fragile; a certain degree of hope is therefore warranted. We welcome in particular the progress made in the political area, with the adoption by the Council of Representatives of the provincial election law as well as the updating of the electoral rolls by the Independent High Electoral Commission. These actions are important steps to strengthening the political dialogue.

Even though significant efforts remain to be made in the area of human rights, including with respect to the protection of women and children, we should welcome certain interesting decisions, among them the ratification by the Iraqi Government of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. We encourage the Iraqi Government to maintain this momentum by adopting the bill on the establishment of an independent human rights commission, a crucial tool for a rational and equitable treatment of human rights-related issues.

Another significant and reassuring aspect that is worth noting is the intensity of diplomatic activity that we have seen in Iraq, including with the restoration of the diplomatic representation of several countries; this offers real prospects for intraregional cooperation.

We have a highly positive view of the important contribution made by the United Nations to Iraq's national reconstruction effort. In particular, the personal commitment of the Special Representative and the prominent role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) have been decisive for the improvement of the political and institutional process; here, we must not overlook their contribution to the organization of free, democratic and transparent elections.

The monitoring and elimination of systematic human rights violations is also at the heart of the Mission's concerns, even though in this area the role of the Iraqi Government and of the Multinational Force is crucial. We hope that the project to support the rule of law and justice in Iraq, supported by the Iraqi Government and the United Nations in partnership with the European Commission, the implementation of which will extend until 2010, will help to further lay the basis for a true democracy in Iraq.

As for economic concerns, we are pleased with the signing by the Iraqi Government and the United Nations of the United Nations Assistance Strategy for Iraq for the period 2008-2010. Along with the national strategy, the International Compact with Iraq and the Development Group Iraq Trust Fund, the Assistance Strategy will make it possible to better coordinate assistance and development initiatives and to build national capacity in the area of governance.

With respect to the violence that we have seen in the past, in particular against certain Christian communities, and above all, looking ahead to the upcoming provincial elections that are planned for the beginning of 2009, we believe that the presence of the Multinational Force and the strengthening of the UNAMI's operational, logistic and security capacities are still necessary.

In conclusion, we would say that more than ever the solidarity of the international community must be affirmed in order to support Iraq in its national reconstruction efforts in an environment of peace with its neighbours and in a stable and secure region.

Mr. La Yifan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Mr. President, the Chinese delegation thanks you for organizing this debate. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his briefing. We welcome the briefing delivered by the Permanent Representative of the United States of America, Ambassador Khalilzad, on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq. We also welcome the presence of the Iraqi Ambassador, Mr. Hamid Al Bayati, at today's debate, and we thank him for his briefing.

The process of peace and recovery in Iraq is now at a critical juncture. We welcome the continuous progress achieved by Iraq in the political, security and reconstruction fields. Objectively, however, the overall security situation in Iraq remains fragile. We are especially concerned about the large number of civilian casualties caused by military operations and violent attacks. We call once again on the parties concerned to do everything possible to avoid civilian casualties while carrying out military operations.

We hope that the Government of Iraq will continue to lead all factions to agree on a common vision for the future of the country by placing national interests above everything else and by strengthening dialogue and unity. We encourage the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to continue its positive role in that regard.

We believe it is essential that political dialogue and the national reconciliation of Iraq be promoted in order to consolidate progress already achieved in various fields. We welcome the recent adoption of the provincial election law, as noted by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2008/688). This law constitutes an important milestone in the political process in Iraq. Provincial elections conducted smoothly in a secure environment will further increase the inclusiveness of the political process in Iraq. We support UNAMI in its continued efforts to provide every possible support to Iraq in this regard.

For progress in the security and political fields to be effectively consolidated, economic and social reconstruction must move ahead. We call upon the international community to truly honour its pledges of aid to Iraq by helping Iraq speed up its process of reconstruction and development. We support a larger role for the meeting of foreign ministers of neighbouring countries and other mechanisms.

Under the leadership of Mr. de Mistura, UNAMI has achieved positive progress in all its activities under difficult circumstances. We express our great appreciation in that regard. We support UNAMI in its continued efforts to accomplish its mission as mandated by the Security Council. UNAMI's close consultation with the Government of Iraq and extensive outreach to all components of Iraqi society are indispensable for the smooth conduct of its activities.

Safety and security have always been the top priority of UNAMI. It is a concern that China shares. We are confident that the Government of Iraq will honour in good faith its commitments in this regard.

Mr. Arias (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his briefing on behalf of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Through him, I would like also to thank the entire Mission and express the gratitude of Panama for the work it has been doing. We would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of the United States, Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, who spoke on behalf of the Multinational Force, for his briefing. Finally, we would like to welcome the Ambassador of Iraq, Mr. Hamid Al Bayati, and to thank him for his important statement to the Council.

We are pleased to see that, in spite of the serious security situation that persists in Iraq, the report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/688) gives some signs of justified optimism. Those signs of optimism are based, first and foremost, on a drop in acts of violence throughout Iraq. That is due in no small measure to the political agreements and understandings achieved among the parties in conflict, with the necessary participation of UNAMI and the leadership of the multinational forces.

The holding of provincial elections in Iraq has been a pending topic for many months, due to a lack of the necessary political agreement on establishing laws and on a suitable institutional framework in which to hold the elections. This is why we note with satisfaction the national voter registration update by the Government of Iraq, as well as the adoption of the provincial elections law, which includes the fundamental issue of the representation of minorities. My delegation recognizes the importance of those achievements for the establishment of democracy in Iraq. It is essential to continue to pay particular attention to those issues.

In spite of those advances, thousands of Iraqis continue living in very adverse humanitarian circumstances. An increase in the presence of humanitarian personnel on the ground is crucial for progress.

That is why we recognize the importance of the fact that the United Nations staff have begun to broaden their presence and activities and that different offices, agencies and programmes involved in this matter have got together to establish a permanent international presence in Baghdad. We believe that that initiative will contribute to the implementation of the goals established in the United Nations Assistance Strategy for Iraq 2008-2010.

On the other hand, the situation of refugees and displaced persons continues to be cause for concern. We recognize the incentives provided by the Government of Iraq for the return of thousands of displaced persons, as well as the measures so that those individuals can recover their property. We urge the Government of Iraq to continue those measures.

No less important is that, as mentioned in the UNAMI report, human rights in Iraq continue to be violated regularly. In that context, we should make special mention of the thousands of people in various detention centres who continue to call for the application of international human rights standards, while they suffer ill treatment and humiliation and while basic procedural guarantees are denied them. That is why the Council should pay more attention to that serious situation and support the efforts of the United Nations bodies that are involved in this matter.

Finally, the main goal of the efforts of this Organization must be to achieve an Iraq that can live in prosperity and peace, both with itself and with its neighbours, an Iraq where human rights are promoted and respected, an Iraq that is free of occupation by multinational forces.

Mr. Laher (South Africa): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his briefing on the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). We also thank the representative of the United States, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, for briefing us on the activities of the multinational force in Iraq.

We welcome the relatively positive developments that have taken place over the last few weeks in Iraq. They include enhanced cooperation among political groups in Iraq and between Iraq and neighbouring countries, as well as an extension of the authority of the Iraqi Government. The recent adoption of the provincial election law is also encouraging.

However, fundamental challenges remain. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/688) indicates, high levels of violence continue and some important groups remain outside the political process. The Secretary-General also reports on the humanitarian plight of refugees and the serious human rights

situation, particularly the violations of human rights of civilians and detainees. That continues to be a grave concern of my Government, and we call on all parties, including the multinational force, to ensure that human rights and international humanitarian law are respected.

Persistent reports of high civilian casualty rates in military operations and of thousands of civilians being detained without being charged or afforded legal due process highlight the urgent need for greater compliance with international and Iraqi law. Moreover, the dire humanitarian situation, particularly that experienced by refugees, continues to have a negative impact on Iraqi and regional stability.

It should be emphasized that the multinational force operates in Iraq under a United Nations mandate. Consequently, its actions have a direct bearing on the credibility and reputation of this body and its ability to act as an honest broker in facilitating national reconciliation and an all-inclusive political process in Iraq, as well as constructive dialogue with its neighbours.

My delegation remains concerns about recent incidents in Syria and elsewhere where the national borders of sovereign nations are violated and innocent civilians are harmed and sometimes killed in contravention of international law.

We are pleased that the United Nations is able to play a positive role in assisting with national reconciliation, internal and regional political dialogue, resolving boundary disputes and providing constitutional and electoral support, as well as humanitarian, reconstruction and development assistance. Therefore, South Africa continues to support the presence of UNAMI in Iraq under its current mandate, in line with our commitment to multilateralism and conflict resolution.

South Africans, for their part, have been sharing their experiences in conflict resolution and national reconciliation with their Iraqi counterparts through the Helsinki II process. We hope that our national experience could offer hope for a better life for the million of Iraqis during this difficult time of their history.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that the Security Council has the responsibility to ensure that the powers it grants to the multinational force are exercised in a manner consistent with the decisions of the Council and that Iraq's natural resources and the funds in the Development Fund for Iraq are used for the benefit of its people.

Mr. Ballestero (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I will now speak in my national capacity. Like the other delegations that have spoken before me, I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for the presentations of the reports on the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and on the multinational force in Iraq. Likewise, I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Iraq, Ambassador Al Bayati, for his statement. For me it is always a personal pleasure to see him in this Chamber.

My delegation is pleased to take note of the positive news contained in the Secretary-General's report on UNAMI (S/2008/688) concerning the progress made in the country's reconstruction and the establishment of a federal, pluralistic and unified Iraq.

In particular, we are pleased at the holding of provincial elections next year, because we believe it is important that Iraqi authorities strengthen their legitimacy in the eyes of the all Iraqi people through the consolidating of democratic processes. We urge UNAMI to continue to contribute, through technical assistance and advice, with a transparent election process that offers representation guarantees for Iraq's citizens.

My delegation supports UNAMI and, in particular, the efforts by Mr. de Mistura in the very positive role they have played in offering the necessary electoral assistance. We believe it is fitting to remind all political players of the Security Council's support for UNAMI, to counter any attempt to manipulate in any way the results of the elections.

We are also pleased by the news of the increase in diplomatic contacts between Iraq and neighbouring countries, a process that will make possible better integration of Iraq into the regional framework and that helps to strengthen the mechanisms of dialogue and cooperation. Costa Rica believes that the stability of Iraq depends to a great extent on cooperation with its neighbours and a stable and secure relationship with them.

My delegation is also pleased to see the progress made in the development of institutional capacity in Iraq, in particular with regard to the management of

public budgets for the delivery of local services. We note the importance of implementing initiatives, such as the United Nations Assistance Strategy for Iraq 2008-2010, recently signed by the Government of Iraq and the United Nations. My country also observes that, thanks to progress in the field, as stated by the Secretary-General,

> "the Government of Iraq is increasingly able to fund its own reconstruction agenda thanks to greater stability and oil revenues, which have been rising through 2008." (*S/2008/688, para. 59*)

Costa Rica certainly is pleased to note this.

In the midst of this positive picture, we continue to be concerned by the ongoing political violence, by terrorist attacks, as well as the deaths of civilians, which take place within the context of military operations.

Lastly, we would like to point out the Secretary-General's statement in paragraph 40 of the same report, to the effect that, "systematic human rights violations remain constant, but are less visible and less widely reported". The protection and promotion of human rights necessarily require reliable and effective reporting mechanisms. For this reason, we urge the Iraqi authorities to continue to fight this culture of impunity, as well as the culture of silence, through the implementation of legal mechanisms to this end.

In this context, my delegation also believes that it is important that the Iraqi authorities adopt the bill to establish an independent human rights commission.

Lastly, we are concerned by the delay of the six-monthly report of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq on human rights. We hope that we can soon have it before the Council.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I have the honour of giving the floor to Mr. de Mistura to respond to the comments and questions that have been raised.

Mr. De Mistura: I will be very short in thanking every member of the Council and His Excellency the Ambassador of Iraq for the words of support and encouragement for what the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Secretary-General's team are trying to do in Iraq. What we have been able to achieve together with the Iraqi Government has been also because the Security Council expressed trust in the Secretary-General and his team in Iraq eight months ago, and we will need that trust and support in the next coming months, because there are challenges ahead.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.